

Should current GRAMA laws be changed? Why or why not?

In a scene from the classic baseball movie, "The Natural", Robert Redford's character, Roy Hobbs, is asked by the owner to meet him in his office. When Hobbs enters the dark room and he immediately asks why the room is so dark. The owner then reveals to Hobbs that he is more comfortable in a dark room. Hobbs subsequently says, "The only thing I know about the dark is that you can't see in it."

In the past few weeks, a legislative task force has met with the intent of changing the Government Records Access and Management Act, better known as GRAMA. More changes to GRAMA, however, would only alter the purpose of the act and move the act in the wrong direction. As a consequence, that would leave the public that much closer to being left "in the dark". GRAMA was first enacted in 1992 and has been used as a model in other states where local governments have guidelines for accessing private and public records. The objective of the original legislation was to comply with every citizen's constitutional right of accessing public records while at the same time, protect the personal data and keep the right to privacy used by government agencies. It should be noted that since 1992, the Legislature has passed 49 bills to revise GRAMA.

Among the current changes proposed by the Republican controlled task force, the first is to restrict public view of legislative email correspondence and another change will allow local governments to charge high fees for access to public records. In addition, they will decide what records are to be released to the public. The co-chairs of the task force, Sen. Thomas of South Weber and Rep. Aagard of Kaysville, both Republicans, need to remember they are public

servants, using computers paid for by the taxpayers of Utah. Therefore, their emails are as such, public record. The slow change of keeping government more secret is obviously a path that Thomas, Aagard and the Republican Party are comfortable with. What are they hiding from? If they are not hiding, perhaps they feel that the voters of Utah are stupid and ignorant. In other words, they will be able to run government as they feel and not worry about being accountable.

Citizens need to speak out about the changes to GRAMA by calling Sen. Thomas and Rep. Aagard and ask why they do not trust the people of Utah and Davis County. Just as Roy Hobbs did as he left the owner's dark room in the "The Natural", voters need to turn on the light switch and send the Republicans a message. The government needs to change their message of secrecy or the people should start looking at changing our government by electing more Democratic officials, who strongly believe in open government and more accountability.

Richard Watson

Chair, Davis County Democrats